



NASW

National Association of Social Workers / Connecticut Chapter

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**Testimony on Bill 7292: AAC Social Workers Title Protection
Labor and Public Employees Committee
March 12, 2019**

Submitted By: Stephen Wanczyk-Karp, LMSW

On behalf of the Connecticut Chapter, National Association of Social Workers, representing over 2,500 members, we thank the Labor and Public Employees Committee for raising AAC Social Workers Title Protection that is meant to reserve the title of Social Worker to those individuals who hold a baccalaureate or master degree in Social Work from a program accredited by the Council on Social Work Education or a doctoral degree in Social Work. By passage of this bill Connecticut will join 35 states that already protect the title of social worker.

It is our belief that in raising this bill that the Labor and Public Employees Committee intended to have before the Committee language that will apply to all social workers, including BSWs who cannot be licensed and MSWs who do not need to be licensed. Unfortunately, the current language in 7292 does the opposite by directly tying in the title protection to the social work license. This language prohibits BSWs and MSW who are not licensed from calling themselves a social worker even though they hold a degree in social work. We are asking the Committee to replace this language with substitute language, of which recommended language is at the end of this testimony. We also seek that the new language be in a separate section of the statute from Sec. 20-195q, so as to not confuse the general title protection we are seeking from the protection related to licensed social worker whereby one can only refer to themselves as a licensed social worker if so licensed.

Social work title protection is necessary first and foremost to give consumers assurance that when they are working with an individual called a social worker that the worker is indeed a professionally trained social worker. The NASW Code of Ethics states that social workers should ensure that their representations to clients are accurate. Yet those who do not hold a social work degree do not practice under the Social Work Code of Ethics and by using the title social worker are in fact misrepresenting to the public their qualifications.

To attain a social work degree requires completing a comprehensive curriculum that is nationally accredited by the Council on Social Work Education. CT has 7 schools graduating BSWs, 5 schools graduating MSWs and another school that will bring in their first classes in the fall. Of the schools, 5 BSW programs and 2 MSW programs are public universities. Thus, Connecticut has invested considerable resources into training professional social workers who deserve to have title protection.

Over the years I have received calls of complaint from consumers and professional social workers regarding a social worker by title only. We had a case where the social worker kept calling a former client for a date. I had to tell this woman that there was nothing we can do as the worker is not licensed or a professional social worker. I had a member who told me she was going to scream if she had to explain family dynamics one more time to a state child protective services worker who did not have a social work degree. For many years we had numerous complaints about state workers who were social workers by title only. I am pleased to report that these calls have dramatically declined since the State began giving preference in hiring to BSWs and MSWs for the social work classification. Often a social worker who started out without the degree and went back to school to get the MSW will say that they are much more effective now that they are professionally trained. The education makes a difference and should be so recognized. Yet consumers still have no way to determine if their worker is a professional social worker. Only full title protection will provide that assurance and protection to the public.

This bill will not cause workers to lose their job. This bill does not restrict persons without a social work degree from performing social service tasks as long as they do not identify themselves as or use the title of social worker. There are many other titles that employers can use, including social service worker, case manager, human services worker, caseworker, etc. This bill simply says that if you are using the title social worker you must hold a degree in social work.

This bill may prove of assistance to employers by having them understand the differences of a professional social worker vs. an employee with the title but not the degree. Especially in terms of liability, it is better for an employer to have a professional degreed social worker who practices in accordance with the professional standards of practice.

CT statute already protects the title of numerous professions, including Psychologist, Chiropractor, Occupational Therapist & Occupational Therapist Assistant, Physical Therapist, Veterinarian, and Massage Therapist, to name just some examples. Social Work, that has existed as a profession for over 100 years deserves to be added to this list.

NASW/CT looks forward to working with Public Health Committee to draft adequate substitute language and to pass bill 7292.

The following is our recommended language:

Social Workers: Title Protection suggested language.

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Gallo & Robinson

Sec. 20-195w. Social Work Title Protection. (a) No person shall (1) use the title “social worker” or any initials associated with such title, or (2) advertise services under the description of social worker, as defined in section 20-195m, unless such person has

attained a baccalaureate or master degree in social work from a Council on Social Work Education accredited program or a doctoral degree in social work.

(b) Persons using the title of social worker without a degree in social work shall be notified to cease use of the title of social worker, such notice shall also be sent to the employer of said person. The Commissioner of Public Health or their designated representative, will be responsible for enforcement of this Act.

(c) (1) Nothing in this section shall prevent any person employed by the Department of Children and Families prior to July 1, 2019 with a title in the social work series of the classified service for using a title in such series to describe or perform his duties in the course of his or her employment with the Department of Children and Families. (2) The Department of Children and Families may employ social work trainees and social workers who do not hold a social work degree at time of hire and such employees may use the title social worker trainee or social worker if such hires attain a master degree in social work from a Council on Social Work Education accredited program or a doctoral degree in social work within five (5) years of the date of employment with the Department of Children and Families.